

What is Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever (HF)?

Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever (HF) is one of numerous viral hemorrhagic fevers and is rare and deadly. It spreads through direct, unprotected contact with the blood or secretions of an infected person, or through exposure to objects (such as needles) that have been contaminated. The Ebola virus often spreads through health care workers, families and friends who take care of someone with Ebola and have direct contact with body fluids. As of April 7, 2014, there are no confirmed cases of Ebola in Sierra Leone. In neighboring Guinea, there have been 143 suspected cases as of April 4, 2014, with 86 deaths and 45 confirmed cases (suspected case fatality rate of 60%). In neighboring Liberia, there are 21 suspected cases with 10 deaths and 3 confirmed positive for Ebola.

How is Ebola transmitted?

Ebola virus is thought to be transmitted through direct contact with virus-containing body fluids (e.g., blood, vomitus, urine, feces, and possibly sweat) from a person who has developed signs and symptoms of illness. It is also spread by contact with contaminated objects or infected animals. Unlike contagious illnesses like influenza or measles, Ebola has NOT been demonstrated to be spread by the respiratory route and therefore is not spread through casual contact in markets, schools or buses/trains. Ebola is not transmitted by mosquitoes.

What are the symptoms of Ebola?

Symptoms may appear anywhere from two to 21 days after exposure to Ebola virus though 8-10 days is most common. The incubation period is usually about five to seven days, but may exceed two weeks. A person suffering from Ebola HF presents with a sudden onset of high fever with any of the following: headache, vomits blood, has joint or muscle pains, bleeds through the body openings (eyes, nose, gums, ears, anus) and reduced urination.

What is the risk of contracting Ebola virus?

The risk of contracting Ebola virus is *extremely low*. In a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), handling body fluids of people who had contracted Ebola virus and preparing the dead bodies for funerals was associated with the illness.

Household contacts of ill persons with Ebola who did not have any direct contact with ill people did **not** contract Ebola virus.

What if a person with Ebola is asymptomatic? Can the virus still be transmitted?

No. There is no evidence that asymptomatic persons still in the incubation period are infectious to others. Furthermore, Ebola is NOT spread like a respiratory virus by those with early or mild illness. Those who develop Ebola are usually so ill that they are bed bound and not walking around in the community and spreading the infection.

How can I best protect myself?

- Avoid contact with the bodily secretions of ill people
- Seek medical care if you develop fever, headache, achiness, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, rash, or red eye
- Practice appropriate and good hand hygiene

Should I avoid certain foods in order to protect myself?

Although there is incomplete understanding of the ecology of Ebola in animals, it appears that cases in humans have been associated with the skinning, butchering and preparing of “bush meat”, including bats, primates (e.g., monkeys, gorillas) and some antelope. Eating undercooked or raw bush meat is therefore another potential risk for Ebola. Beef, pork, chicken, lamb and fish have never been implicated in Ebola outbreaks.

How can I find out more?

- Continue to visit the U.S. Embassy Freetown website and Facebook page for regular updates. <http://freetown.usembassy.gov/index.html>
- World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/>